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BCCC REPORT ON OKANAGAN LAKE, 1989

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Okanagan Lake is a large body of water in south-central British Columbia, a western Canadian province. Since early settler times, the lake has been the source of many reports of large, unidentified animals or "lake monsters," known generically as Ogopogo, as well as Indian mythology of a large monster. This is also the case with numerous other North American lakes, most notably Lake Champlain, located between the U.S. states of New York and Vermont, and jutting north into the Canadian province of Quebec.

The British Columbia Cryptozoology Club (BCCC), founded in May of 1989, carried out its first two field expeditions to Okanagan Lake during the summer of 1989. The objective of the first expedition was to determine the best vantage points for lake surveillance. The second expedition was to conduct further surveillance, as well as to deploy a remotely operated vehicle (ROV) in the lake. The principal participants were the author and James Clark, assisted by John Kirk, Jr., and Barbara Clark.

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

On July 29, Messrs. Kirk and Kirk carried out fieldwork at Peachland, which affords sweeping views of the lake in an area that has produced a plethora of sighting reports. Observation was made simple by the absence of wind and cloud in the area, and visibility was excellent for a distance of 12 miles north and 8 miles east. Kirk Sr. noted that the famous Ogopogo marker constructed by the British Columbia government on the east side of Highway 97 served as an observation platform which afforded excellent viewing of the lake (Fig. 1).

That afternoon, the western side of the lake was investigated for possible observation posts, but few high-level sites were suitable, and those by the lakeshore only offered limited viewing because of the headlands and points which are numerous in the area. Fintry, at the northwest end of the lake, was examined to determine why Ogopogo supposedly frequents the area. The elusive lake monster has reportedly been spotted by several boaters in the area, but no noticeable large fish population was detected in the vicinity.

The focus of investigation turned to Summerland, and a particularly good vantage point was located at Peach Orchard Beach, Lower Summerland, on July 30. All four members of the investigating team were stationed at various points on the beachfront when, at 3:55 p.m., a most extraordinary occurrence took place. A large patch of white water materialized close to a headland at the southern end of the beach, drawing the attention of the BCCC observers.

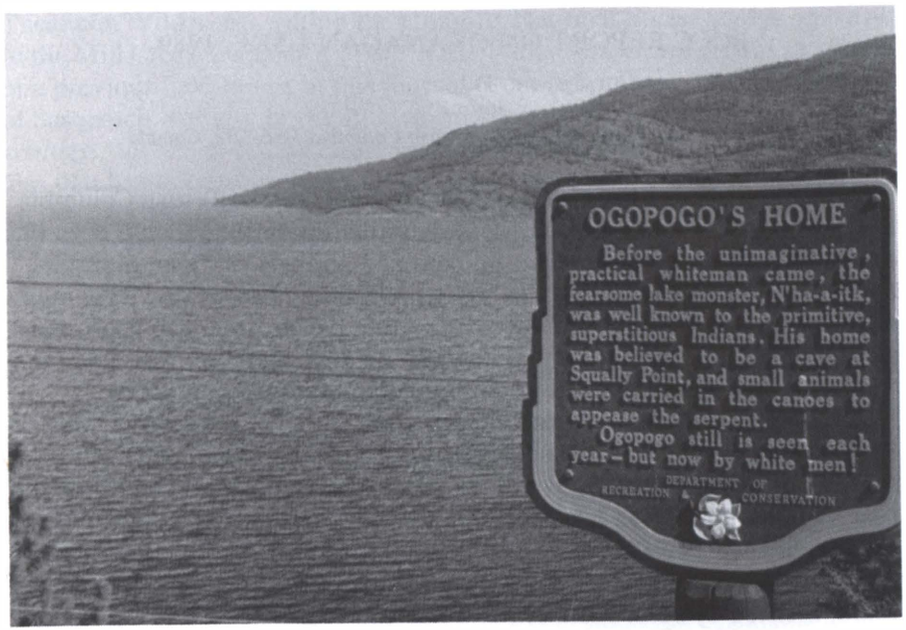
OGOPOGO'S HOME
Before the unimaginative, practical whiteman came, the fearsome lake monster, N'ha-a-itk, was well known to the primitive, superstitious Indians. His home was believed to be a cave at Squally Point, and small animals were carried in the canoes to appease the serpent.
Ogopogo still is seen each year – but now by white men!
DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION & CONSERVATION

FIG. 1.—The Ogopogo marker off Highway 97 offers an excellent view of Okanagan Lake.

It was about 1,000 feet distant at this point, and it was clear that a large animal was swimming in a northerly direction against the prevailing wind and slight swell. At a distance of about 600 feet, Kirk Sr. was able to see clearly through a Bushnell 40× telescope that this was the classic Ogopogo, with its humps well above the water level. Both Clarks were also able to see the object clearly through binoculars. The animal displayed, variously, five and sometimes six humps.

Kirk's telescope allowed him to see that the animal's skin was whale-like, and that there were what appeared to be random calcium-like deposits under the skin which appeared to be similar to barnacles in shape. All the team members agreed that the animal was between 30 and 35 feet in length, and was almost 3 feet above the surface at its highest point—that being the middle hump. The sighting was confirmed by a local couple who refused to give their names. These other witnesses were located about 300 feet behind the BCCC contingent, but they were still able to see the animal clearly.

Mr. and Mrs. Clark and Kirk Jr. were all able to see the tail, which protruded to a height of about 12 inches above the water. Kirk Sr. was unable to see the tail, as his focus was on the animal's center hump, which sank to a height of 1 foot, and then alternately rose again in a series of seemingly lazy undulations.

Further viewing of the animal was prevented by the convergence of two motorboats just meters away from the animal, which caused it to take cover by submerging vertically as the crafts came closer. The total sighting lasted 105 seconds. Drawings of the animal were made by all four members of the team (Fig. 2).

Rattlesnake Island has long been reputed to be the home of Ogopogo, so it was targeted for investigation on August 1. Mention had been made that the animal had previously been seen "sunning" itself on a ledge on the island. As Jim Clark had suffered from severe sunburn during previous outings, he and Barbara Clark were unable to join the Kirks, who were taken to the island aboard a CKIQ Radio cruiser. The cruiser was piloted by broadcaster Blaine Pudwell, and we were also accompanied by Angela Yielding, of Thornhill, Ontario.

No discernible ledge was located on the island or the nearby shoreline, but many optical illusions which appeared to resemble a lake monster were noted. A variety of standing, reflected, and refracted waves produced artificial humps, and at times strongly resembled a head just above the surface. Investigation of the great bend of the lake southeast of Peachland failed to produce any sign of the legendary animal or its habitat.

At approximately 3:15 p.m., Pudwell, a firm disbeliever in the Ogopogo phenomenon, turned the attention of the other occupants to the west side of the lake. Traveling through the water at a speed of about 15 miles per hour was a large animal, heading south. The two Kirks noted that, during the sighting 2 days earlier, the animal had been locomoting at a speed of only about 5 miles per hour.

Pudwell and Yielding were at the front of the boat, and were able to see clearly between five and six humps, which the Kirks also confirmed. No head was visible, as the object moved from a distance of 600 feet to less than 300 feet from the bow of the boat, directly in front. At their highest, the animal's humps were 3 feet out of the water and undulating very slightly.

Approximately 2 minutes of videotape were shot of the animal's appearance, and although the image is jittery, several sequences show a series of humps moving rapidly through the water. The entire sighting lasted 2 minutes, 45 seconds.

Having succeeded in sighting the Ogopogo on two occasions, the BCCC was approached by Robotic Systems International (RSI), of Sidney, British Columbia, to participate in a joint expedition from August 25 to 29. On this expedition, RSI was able to provide an ROV (remotely operated vehicle), which included a JVC 8-millimeter videocamera, and a 100-watt spotlight mounted inside a propeller-driven underwater sled.

On the morning of August 26, John Kirk Sr. was investigating a potential viewing site at Bertram Creek Regional Park when, at 10:45 a.m., his attention was drawn to a large object just beyond a point to the west. On

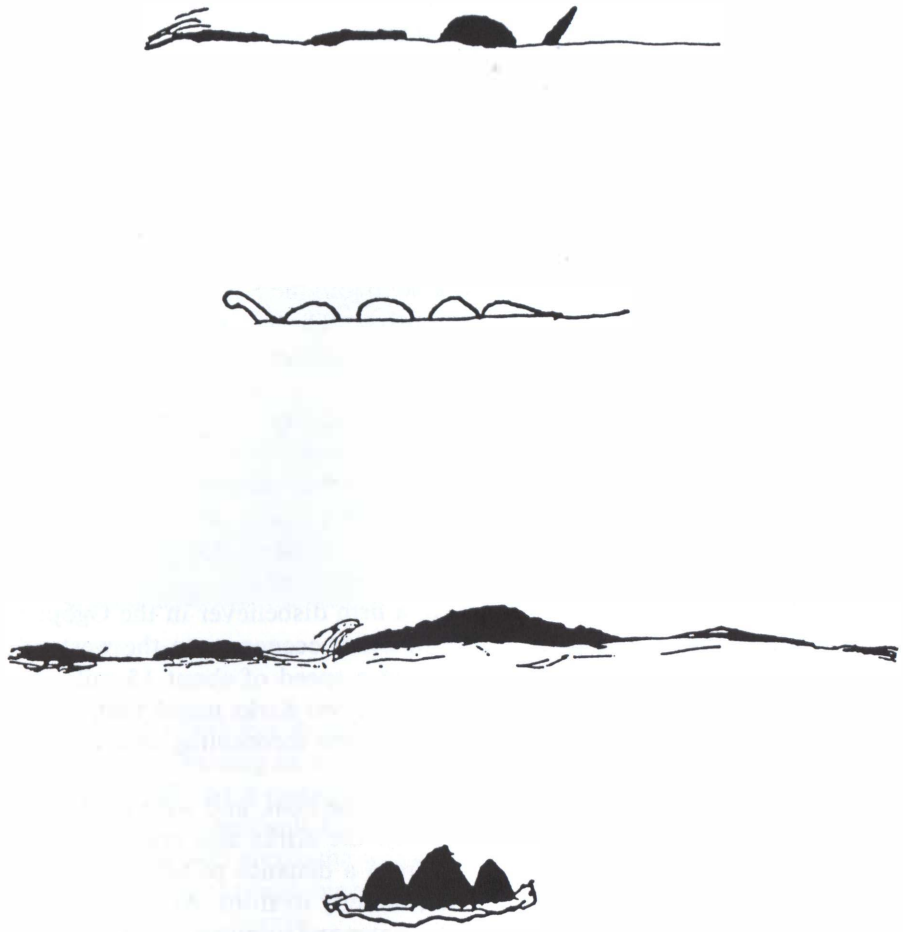

FIG. 2.—Drawings of the unidentified animal observed in Okanagan Lake by the BCCC team on July 30, 1989. From top to bottom, drawings are by James Clark, Barbara Clark, John Kirk, and John Kirk, Jr.

climbing up to the point, Kirk was able to observe 10–14 humps about 1,000 feet offshore, spread across about 120 feet of water. These represented not one animal but two, as one group of humps appeared to be swimming at a slightly different angle from the second group.

The humps remained in view for a minute before disappearing from view. Half an hour later, Kirk was able to see four large protrusions across the lake on the west side, near the earlier sighting, and noted that the protrusions covered a total length of 60 feet. Another sighting was obtained by Kirk that evening as he drove to Penticton. A large black hump measuring 25 feet in

length was spotted by Kirk close to Rattlesnake Island. The hump was at least 4 feet out of the water, and moving northward very slowly. Kirk was able to shoot 20 minutes of videotape, which shows the hump submerging, surfacing, and splashing.

On 29 August, the ROV was launched by Chris Roper, Marine Division manager of RSI, from the shores of Rattlesnake Island. The objective of the search at this phase was to locate any possible caves under the island in which the animals are alleged to dwell. The ROV functioned perfectly, and sharp images were returned to the monitor on shore. No trace of a cave, or of an Ogopogo, was found. An earlier test run at Okanagan Lake Bridge also failed to locate one of the animals or its traces.

After returning to Shelter Bay Marina to regroup, Kirk noticed something moving towards Okanagan Lake Bridge at 3:45 p.m. He was able to attract the attention of three tourists from Ontario, who also sighted the animal. Three black humps measuring about 20 feet in length were moving at approximately 8 miles per hour. The three tourists, Rob Turnbull, Tricia Plancher, and a third individual who wished to remain unidentified, confirmed Kirk's sighting. As details of the sighting were being recorded, something large began pushing water in the opposite direction of the animal seen moments before. Seconds later, a black hump 3 feet high rose out of the water before the same group of witnesses. Kirk ran to get his camera and alerted Roper, who also saw the animal. Turnbull, Plancher, and the third, unidentified Ontario tourist noted that the animal's tail was visible. Kirk did not see the tail, as he was searching for his camera at the time.

RESULTS

The first fieldwork at Okanagan Lake conducted by BCCC resulted in several visual sightings of large, unidentified animals. The interpretation of these visual sightings is continuing. Also, for the first time, an ROV was deployed in the lake and operated successfully.

Following the spate of sightings experienced during the past summer, BCCC has decided to undertake further fieldwork in the summer of 1990. At present, plans are in the initial phase, but it is anticipated that more technology will be employed in the next expedition. Tragically, James Clark succumbed to a heart attack on September 3, 1989. His participation was an invaluable asset to the team, and he will be missed.